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SUBJECT: TURKEY AND ITS NEIGHBORS: NOVEMBER 1 FM GUL PRESS
CONFERENCE

1. Summary. In a wide-ranging November 1 press conference, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul acknowledged a "new phase" in U.S. - Turkish cooperation against (PKK) terrorism and addressed developments with a number of Turkey's problematic neighbors. His remarks on Iran in the wake of Iranian President Ahmedinejad's troubling statement are covered septel. End Summary.

2. Turkey - U.S. Gul noted that Turkey and the U.S. had a special and comprehensive relationship and referred to high-level U.S. visitors to Turkey in the preceding months. He stressed there was "sound" cooperation between Turkey and the U.S. in the fight against terrorism, adding that talks were underway on this matter. While acknowledging that the results of counter-terrorism cooperation would not be immediately evident, he said "I can tell you we have entered a new phase."

3. Barzani Visit. Gul appeared to downplay Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Massoud Barzani's official visit to the U.S., stressing Barzani visited as the president of a region of Iraq, as understood in the Iraqi constitution. Gul underlined the need to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity and warned that, while PKK terrorists were harming Turkey today, they could just as easily harm Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq tomorrow.

4. Iraq. Again on Iraq, Gul predicted the December elections would be a milestone and expressed his hope that the passage of the constitution will strengthen Iraq's "integrity and unity." He reiterated Turkey's position that the new assembly would have to modify the constitution to remove its imperfections.

5. Syria. Turning to developments in Syria, Gul was more circumspect, noting that Syria was in a sensitive period and that Turkey was watching developments there closely in the wake of the Mehliis report.

6. Caucasus. Addressing the south Caucasus, Gul said that "transparent elections will make Azerbaijan stronger in international fora." He welcomed the upcoming visit of the Georgian Prime Minister to Turkey and noted that oil from the Baku-Thilisi-Ceyhan pipeline would soon reach Ceyhan. Gul dismissed the European Parliament's resolution acknowledging the Armenian "genocide," noting it had no force in law.

7. Terrorism. Gul was critical of Belgium for failing to prosecute Fehriye Erdal, accused of terrorist crimes in Turkey, but said he did not believe the Belgian court decision not to prosecute Erdal was a political one directed against Turkey. He hoped the Belgian government would find "a way out" in this matter, noting the problem was in Brussels, not Ankara. He also noted PM Erdogan would make a one-day visit to Germany in the coming days.

8. Cyprus. Gul highlighted the importance of TRNC "President" Talat's visit to the U.S. and noted the Turkish proposal to lift all restrictions regarding Cyprus at the same time. "No settlement can be reached by unilateral efforts only," he concluded.

9. EU Accession. Gul said the EU's progress report on Turkey and the Accession Partnership Accord is expected on November 9. He emphasized that issues such as mother tongue (read Kurdish language) education and having the Turkish General Staff report to the Ministry of National Defense are not mentioned in the draft texts. Noting that the screening process is underway, Gul said that negotiations could be opened on chapters after they are screened. On EU demands to open Turkish ports to Greek Cypriot vessels by 2006, Gul said Turkey's views were known to all. He dismissed as "pure rhetoric" Greece's reported statement that Turkey could not become an EU member unless it withdraws its troops from Cyprus, noting the overall settlement issue remains on the UN agenda. He reaffirmed Turkish support for the TRNC in the face of Greek Cypriot intransigence over the Annan Plan.

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